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Title: Using STARTALK principals in the beginning Russian class at UCF

Abstract:

The Russian Program at UCF offers an exceptional opportunity for college and high school students to develop foreign language skills in Russian. This immersive and culturally focused program is unique because it includes a STARTALK summer curriculum that pushes students to speak in the target language at every stage of proficiency. Furthermore, each student's language development is connected with content in their academic discipline, tailoring the program curriculum to individualized academic and professional goals. The Russian Language STARTALK Summer Program consists of student-produced authentic material based on the theme "Preparation Business Trip to Russia". Through the lens of professional career development applicable to all majors, UCF combines language immersion with business and leadership to take full advantage of the region's strength in technology and innovation. The program, in its third year of implementation, builds on continuous knowledge from each language level. Two teaching instructors and Program Director are assisted by Teaching Assistants who have completed study abroad and were previous STARKTALK program participants. Students who are in the beginning class focus on the cultural information they learn from the program's extracurricular field trips to understand the culture in lieu of higher vocabulary not yet available at the beginning novice level. Second year students' work to further enhance their language skills through the creation of digital stories on thematic topics including: navigating the airport, attending Moscow State University, and ordering a restaurant meal. In the program's final week both groups participate in a short "business interview" speaking about themselves (name, birthday, interests) with business members of the local Russian Orlando community. Interview questions are knowledge and ability specific to each proficiency level with the central goal of developing communicative competence in a business setting. When not in language classes, students spend their afternoons learning about Russian culture through interactive, jeopardy-style games and field trips to the community (locations this year included the Russian Orthodox Church, Holocaust Museum, Russian-American Community Center). Teaching Assistants present an aspect of Russian culture (artists, politicians, scientists etc.) and students work together to answer relevant questions in Russian, about a given topic. Students also work through navigating and negotiating the cultural differences between Russian and United States culture. In the last class, students demonstrate their learned knowledge through presentations, songs and final class projects including digital stories. After the program, students, inspired to continue their studies, enroll in university Russian courses, connect with local Russian schools, and apply for other research programs such as Boren or Fulbright. UCF presenter will share examples of the activities and content which help language students strengthen their speaking ability, advance their reading and writing skills, and how instructors can monitor and assess learning progress.